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AUTHOR Markham, Reed
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ABSTRACT

A speechwriter who prepares a text for public address should first consider whether he or she is going to deliver the speech personally and should be careful to select a topic which the potential audience will not strongly oppose. From the introduction of a speech to its conclusion, a speechwriter should have definite goals, present an appropriate discussion of the topic, and maintain an awareness of the personal characteristics of the speaker. To evaluate a speech, a public address critic should examine the use of five supporting elements of the text: (1) illustration; (2) definition; (3) analogies; (4) statistics; and (5) language. In essence, effective speechwriters will assume a role: to some extent they must be able to impart confidence and to sense the character of an audience. (NKA)

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PRINCIPLES OF SPEECHWRITING: EFFECTIVE SPEECHWRITING ELEMENTS

BY REED MARKHAM
COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT
CALIFORNIA STATE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

Effective speechwriting can influence audiences to change their beliefs. In our everyday activities we present short and sometimes lengthy speeches where we try to convince someone of our viewpoint. The speeches to be examined during this discussion are those which are planned out in advance of delivery and written in a text form. When changes are sought which do more than just reinforce beliefs one faces some difficult speech-writing questions.

When beginning to prepare a public address two factors need to be considered. First, one may not know how the speech will be delivered. One may be preparing his own speech or it may be written for someone else to deliver. Second, the speechwriter must be careful to select a topic which the potential audience will not strongly oppose.

According to John F. Wilson:

> You cannot always ask for great changes of beliefs and attitudes. To do so when listerners oppose your views or hold firmly to views somewhat different from yours is almost sure to turn them off.[1]

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[1]John F. Wilson, Public Speaking as a Liberal Art, Boston: Allyn & Bacon, Inc., 1978, p. 179.

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Success in speechwriting involves comparing the influence the written speech can achieve and what is reasonably possible after considering the circumstances. For example, Neal A. Maxwell, a prominent educational leader must be counted as successfully influencing others through his speeches if he influences just a small group of people to change.

The views of the majority of the people in the nation and world will not be changed no matter how well his speech is written. Maxwell attempts in his public speeches to reinforce the beliefs of those who already hold his views and then to alter those who don't on a point-by-point basis.

To analyze a speech for effectiveness it is important to take a look at the goals of the speechwriter. This analysis will be called the specification of goals. The structure of this analysis is as follows:

1. Identification of the specific goals of the speechwriter. This includes defining what the organization needs to hear, what kind of change is desired, and what sources will be used.

2. The general goal can be broken down into subgoals. By looking at the subgoals each unit of impact can be analyzed. By viewing successive subgoals an overall perspective of the general goal can be obtained.

3. In speechwriting it is essential to bring into focus the consequences of reaching or not reaching

the goal. This includes analyzing the failures and successes of both the subgoals and general goals.

4. General questions need to be asked about the goals including: What was the nature of the audience? How many people needed to be changed? What control will the speaker have over the audience? What are the time limits?

To measure the impact that effective speech can have on an audience, it is also necessary to view the characteristics of the speaker. The information should include the following: sex, age, dress, race, unusual physical characteristics, educational level, socioeconomic background, profession, dominant personality features (forceful, serious, shy, sincere, etc.), history of attitude toward subject, situation for speech delivery, role of speaker, type of audience, duration of time with audience, and the time of day the speech is to be delivered.

The speechwriter also needs to be aware of the many characteristics of an audience. The following audience factors should be included:

> First, the fundamental drives or impelling motives that cause people to act, such as patriotism, feelings of brotherhood, self-preservation, sense of duty, etc. Second, the mental and emotional factors that hinder the acceptance of reason and argument and cause resistance to action, such as prejudice, bias, stubborness, fear, doubt, etc.[2]

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[2]E. F. Elson, The Art of Speaking, New York: Ginn & Company, 1966, p. 249.

When an analysis of the potential audience has been completed, the research on the topic can begin.

DESCRIPTION OF ELEMENTS

The public address critic is a person who takes on the responsibility of evaluating a speech. The public address critic analyzes the finished speech and acts as an interpreter of the speech. The person who reads or hears a speech and says, "I enjoyed it" is not being critical. A critical statement has to be verifiable, or in other words, reasons can be given to support the statement. The following is a description of five supporting elements a public address critic should use to evaluate a speech.

Illustration

An illustration is a detailed example used to illuminate an idea. It could be used to picture results from accepting a certain proposal or it could describe conditions. Illustration uses both comparison and contrast. There are two basic types of illustration--hypothetical and factual.

A hypothetical example is imaginary and consistent with known facts. The hypothetical example has the element of probability of occurrence. The following illustration from a speech helped an audience understand a student whose family had little background in speaking English:

> But imagine a child whose English is only a second language. Never spoken at home, this language must be absorbed from the outside--a piecemeal of key phrases; a vocabulary based on acquisition, not comprehension. Schooling becomes a disadvantage in itself. Forced to use a foreign language, the child can worry about mastery of material covered in class only after comprehending the web of its delivery. He is marked as "slow," unable to comprehend questions directed at him, and too afraid and uncertain to ask. He has been relegated to a position that may very well defy his intellectual capacities. This small, future resource has been dealt the beginnings of its demise.[3]

Factual illustrations are effective with listeners if they are vivid. They are likely to be vivid since they actually occurred. Through the use of actual experiences the audience is more likely to relate to ideas presented to them. People like to hear about themselves and the places in which they live. An example about thousands of starving children in Africa is distressing. When the illustration is related with sympathy and emotion, the story will evoke some response. But if one describes the plight of little Susie Jones living down your street--she's suffering from malnutrition because her unemployed father cannot provide enough food--the audience can identify with the problem. Immediate aid will result.

In a recent speech on the cost of medical care, the following factual illustration was used:

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[3]Douglas Ehninger, Principles and Types of Speech Communication, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1978, p. 107.

> But how much does chronic illness cost in America today? Let me give you a personal example. My mother has rheumatoid arthritis, not an uncommon disease, for most of us as part of the aging process will suffer some stiffening and inflammation of the joints. My mother, however, has been an arthritic for the last twenty-eight years, and for the past nine has been confined to a wheelchair. During the years '62-'71 she was in and out of the hospital nine separate times and spent a total of thirty-seven weeks between hospital walls. Her hospital bill for that period of time amounted to over $14,000. And that figure does not even begin to include regular visits to her physician, prescribed medication, and physical therapy stretching back over the last twenty-eight years. Now my father is not a rich man, and as a young couple they did not plan on her chronic illness, but he works for a company with an excellent group health insurance plan that pays 80 percent of his medical expenses. We were lucky. But there seems to be something inherently wrong with a health-care system that can inflict such financial burdens on the consumer. Out of necessity we have become cost-conscious and not care-conscious about our health.[4]

Illustration comes from the Latin word "illustrare", which means "to shed light, to illuminate". Since the illustration is effective in shedding light on subjects, the speaker should pick good illustrations. There are five elements that theorists believe should be contained in an effective illustration.

First, the speaker's ideas should be clear by associating them with subjects which are familiar to the audience. Second, the illustration should give form and substance to the speaker's ideas. Third, it should lodge the idea firmly in the mind of the audience. Fourth, it should demonstrate what the speaker is

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[4]Ehninger, p. 108.

saying to the audience. Fifth, it should be in story form.[5]

Definitions

When the speaker uses an idea or topic that is unfamiliar to the audience, it should be defined. There are many ways to define an object. Some of the methods are as follows: (1) tracing the origin of the word; (2) differentiating an idea from similar ideas in the same class; (3) classifying the term into categories the audience can understand; (4) explaining the purpose of the concept; (5) exemplifying the unfamiliar term; (6) explaining what the term does not refer to; and (7) explaining the term from a specific vantage point.[6]

Many of the formal kinds of defining are overused in speaking. For example, definitions from a dictionary (classification) are frequently used. Definitions that compare and contrast are interesting and easy to understand. Concrete items are easier to define than abstract objects. For example, the definition of a theodolite may be defined this way:

> A theodolite is a surveying instrument (classification) that sits upon a heavy tripod like a camera (comparison). It measures horizontal and vertical angles (purpose) by means of a telescope that

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[5]Alan M. Curtis, "Bruce Barton: His Use of Illustrations in Platform Speaking," M.A. Thesis, B.Y.U., 1970, p. 6.

[6]Wilson, p. 151.

is calibrated to horizontal and vertical scales (function).[7]

Abstract terms are much more difficult to explain. For example, let us turn to the dictionary definition of the word "standard deviation": "A statistic used as a measure of dispersion in a distribution, the square root of the arithmetic average of the squares of the deviations from the mean." The problem with the above definition is that it is only comprehensible to experts in the statistics field.

The following is an example of the word, "standard deviation" in layman's terms:

> If you measured the height of a typical sample of American males, you might find that the average height was 5 feet 9 inches. But not everyone in the sample would be of that height: some would be much taller (some basketball players are 7 feet tall or more). The standard deviation is a number that tells us to what extent people in a typical sample will vary from the established mean. The standard deviation allows us to compare the expected height variation of a typical sample with the height variation in another sample that may or may not be typical. If the height variation in a comparison sample differs from the standard deviation, we know that, for some reason or other, the stature of that group as a whole is not "normal". It is not a typical group as far as height variation is concerned.[8]

Although this definition is quite long, I feel it is clear. The above is an example of a definition of a term with a fixed meaning. Many abstract terms are

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[7]Wayne C. Minnick, Public Speaking, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1979, p. 91.

[8]Minnick, p. 92.

less fixed. For example, words like conservative, balanced, and responsibility, have many definitions. Speakers commonly use such terms for their own purposes. Richard Nixon used the term "morally wrong" to his advantage in his "Checkers" speech. Nixon was defending himself against charges that he was using money from a political fund for his personal use. The following is his use of the word "morally wrong":

> I am sure you have read the charge, and you have heard it that, I, Senator Nixon, took $18,000 from a group of my supporters.
>
> Now, was that wrong? And let me say that it was wrong. I am saying, incidentally, that it was wrong, not just illegal, because it isn't a question of whether it was legal or illegal. That isn't enough.
>
> The question is, was it morally wrong? I say that it was morally wrong--if any of the $18,000 went to Senator Nixon, for my personal use. I say that it was morally wrong if it was secretly given and secretly handled.
>
> And I say that it was morally wrong if any of the contributors got special favors for the contributions they made.[9]

Nixon goes on to say that he did not use the money for his personal use. According to his definition, Nixon was not "morally wrong".

Analogies

Comparing an idea with a familiar concept is one way to help an audience understand a concept. An analogy or comparison consists of showing the similarities between two entities. For example, the game of cricket

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[9]Richard M. Nixon, "My Side of the Story," Vital Speeches of the Day, 19, 1952, pp. 11-12.

could be explained to an audience by comparing it with baseball. There are two basic types of analogies--figurative and literal.

A figurative analogy expresses one thing in terms normally denoting another. It involves phenomena which are basically different, yet exhibit comparable properties. They are used to make ideas clear to an audience. Dr. Louis Evans of the Presbyterian Church drew the following analogies to distinguish between the terms "deist" and "theist".

> To you the world is what: a clock or a car? Is it a huge clock, that God once made, that He wound up at the beginning and left it to run of itself? Then you are a deist.
>
> Do you believe that it is rather a car that God once made, but that does not run without His hand on the wheel, without His ultimate and personal control? Then you are a theist.[10]

A literal analogy is an actual comparison. Like phenomena are compared such as describing why a volleyball is the same size as a basketball. In this instance, we mean that the ball has the approximate diameter of a basketball. Let's turn to an example from a speech concerning student responsibility:

> To show that an active and effective student government would help to reduce disciplinary problems at Iowa, we may refer to the experience of the university I attended before transferring here last fall--a school which, like Iowa, has between 15,000 and 16,000 students and which is a publicly supported state institution.
>
> Prior to reconstituting student government as a vital responsible force, the office of the dean

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[10]Ehninger, p. 106.

> at my former university handled more than 600 disciplinary cases each year. After putting new responsibility and authority into the hands of the students themselves, however, this number was cut by more than half, and the number of merely trivial or nuisance offenses decreased by about two thirds. The dean himself attributed this reduction chiefly to the new sense of pride which a revitalized student government had given the students in their school.[11]

The literal analogy needs to compare instances which are closely similar in all essential respects. Comparisons also include metaphors and similes. A metaphor is a word or phrase used in speech to denote that one object is being used in place of another. Whittier cites the following examples of metaphors: "the hatred of entrenched greed"; "America will always stand for liberty"; "Democracy is the healthful lifeblood which circulates through the veins and arteries of society"; "Whether in chains or in laurels, liberty knows nothing but victories".[12]

Metaphors should be used with care. The speaker needs to make sure that the principal subject is not lost in the image. Martin Luther King had occasional trouble with misplaced metaphors. Two or more metaphors in a single thought can be safely used only by the greatest speakers without incurring ridicule. Some examples are as follows: "To take arms against a

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[11]Ehninger, p. 106.

[12]Charles H. Whittier, Speechwriting in Perspective, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1979, p. 5.

sea of troubles"; "The fascist octopus has sung its swan-song".[13]

A simile is a figure of speech used to liken one thing to another. For example, "she walks like a cowboy"; "he laughs like a hyena". Occasionally a comparison can be cast as a contrast. A contrast focuses on differences rather than similarities. For example: "Unlike last year when we did mostly period drama, this year we are producing mostly comedies and musicals."[14] Analogies add meaning to ideas.

Statistics

Statistics add credibility to a speech. "Many people consider statistics dull. Others say that statistics can prove any point. In any event, they add greatly to a talk, if not quoted interminably."[15] Statistics show relationships among phenomena. There are three types of statistics--magnitudes, trends, and segments. Statistics are useful in making clear the nature of a situation and substantiating a contestable claim. An effective speaker can synthesize great masses of information into useable categories.

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[13]Whittier, p. 5.

[14]Rudolph F. Verderber, The Challenge of Effective Speaking, California: Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc., 1976, p. 37.

[15]Cy Campbell, Power and Influence Through Public Speaking, New York: Parker Publishing Company, 1972, p. 51.

Magnitudes emphasize the largeness or smallness of a problem. The use of a magnitude helps the audience to grasp the dimensions of the problem. Tom Steed, U.S. Representative from Oklahoma made effective use of magnitude in a speech about government red tape and paperwork:

> Government agencies print about 10 billion sheets of paper to be filled out by U.S. businessmen-enough to fill more than 4 million cubic feet. Paperwork stemming from federal, state, and local governments averages about 10 forms for every man, woman, and child in the United States. Official records stored around the country total 11.6 million cubic feet, or an amount 11 times larger than the volume of the Washington Monument. Paperwork generated by Washington alone in one year would fill Yankee Stadium from the playing field to the top of the stands 51 times.[16]

Trends indicate where we have been and where we are going. Statistics are frequently used to describe trends across time. Senator William Fulbright used a trend effectively to show the growth of inflation and to predict the economic disaster that awaited us if the trend continued:

> The major cause of accelerated inflation is the massive imbalancing of international payments caused by the quadrupling of the price of oil since the October war. The United States--far more fortunate than other countries because we produce nearly two thirds of our own oil requirements--nonetheless will pay an estimated $25 billion for imported oil in 1974, more than triple the $7.5 billion paid in 1973. Meanwhile, the oil reserves of the producing countries will have risen from $15 billion in 1972 to nearly $100 billion in 1974, giving them surplus revenues on the order of $60 billion over

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[16]Ehninger, p. 109.

> and above their total import requirements. With this trend continuing and accelerating, the credit of consuming countries--rich as well as poor--will soon be exhausted, giving rise to economic collapse and political upheaval.[17]

Segments are statistics which isolate the parts of a problem. This type of statistic is extremely helpful in describing complex subject matter. By breaking a problem into smaller units an audience will be able to comprehend the message. We turn to an example from a speech by Rose Fuhrmann. She sought to dispel an economic myth that the have-not nations import, whereas the have nations only export. Notice the following use of segments:

> The common vision is that of the poorer nations of the world doing all of the expensive importing of goods, with the richer nations getting richer by carrying out all of the lucrative exporting business. That is not the case at all. In 1971, for example, the United States accounted for 13.9 percent of the world's imports. Further, West Germany was responsible for 10.5 percent of the total; the United Kingdom, 7.3 percent; France, 6.5 percent; Japan, 6.0 percent. In all, almost half of the world's imports went to five of the Western world's largest and most powerful countries--hardly a case of the "haves" doing all of the selling and none of the buying.[18]

The effective speaker will provide some type of statistic to back up claims that are important and possibly unfamiliar to the audience. When considering the use of a statistic a speechwriter should ask himself the following questions:

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[17]Ehninger, p. 110.

[18]Rhninhrt, p. 110.

1. Does it come from a reliable source? An eyewitness? An expert? Someone trustworthy? A rogue?
2. Does the information appear accurate? Are there dates? Statistics? Do they fit reality?
3. Does the evidence appear in its entirety? Are sources cited? Are both sides presented? Quoted fully? Not substantially altered?
4. Does the speaker appear to have worked hard for the proof? Has there been fieldwork? Careful library research? Firsthand experiences? Or did the speaker fall into the material by propinquity?
5. Does the evidence support the topic? Is it simply interesting commentary?[19]

Language

The effective speechwriter will be aware of the distinction between the written and spoken language. The speechwriter needs to learn how to write "aloud". The speechwriter also needs to make sure that the language is clear and easy to understand.

Repetition and reiteration can emphasize and enhance an idea. This technique should not be used frequently because it tends to be distracting. In Martin Luther King's address, "I Have a Dream", he uses the repetition technique effectively. Similarly, note Winston Churchill's defiance of Hitler:

> We shall fight in France and on the seas and oceans; we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air. We shall defend our island whatever the cost may be; we shall fight on the beaches and landing grounds, in fields, in streets, and on the hills.

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[19]Irving J. Rein, The Public Speaking Book, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1981, p. 153.

Franklin Roosevelt, in his "One Third of a Nation" speech imparts a sense of urgency with his repetition of "Here are . . ." and "now".[20]

> Here is one-third of a Nation ill-nourished, ill clad, ill-housed--NOW.
> Here are thousands upon thousands of farmers wondering whether next year's prices will meet their mortgage-interest--NOW.
> Here are thousands upon thousands of men and women laboring for long hours in factories for inadequate pay--NOW.[21]

George Orwell's advice on the selection of language is to cut out any word which can possibly be cut. He suggested avoiding Ciceronian oratory on the one hand and Dick-and-Jane simplicity on the other extreme. According to Whittier the average sentence runs from 8 to 14 words. Anything longer than 14 words is hard to follow. Complex sentences can be clarified by repetition of key words phrases.[22]

Sentence variety if important to an effective speech. Sentence variety means to alternate longer sentences with short ones. Sentence variety includes the use of rhetorical questions (Is peace a rash system?) sentence fragments (Lower credit. Less enterprise in business.), inverted order (With what dignity and courage they perished in that day), suspension

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[20]Whittier, p. 2.

[21]Whittier, p. 3.

[22]Whittier, p. 3.

for climax (My obligation as President is historic; it is clear; yes (it is inescapable), periodic sentences (Thus did he prove to be a leader who--victorious in battle, magnanimous in victory, skilled in the arts of peace--was able, in the face of his most determined foes.).[23]

Repeating key words and using simple connectives (and, for, because, but) can make complex sentences easy for the audience to understand. Word quality is important in writing a speech. High word quality is persuasive to an audience because it exemplifies the intellectual qualifications of the speaker. We turn to a comment by Cy Campbell:

> Everyone will admit poetry is a prime example of picture painting with words. But prose, needs moving, descriptive words, too. If you are trying to influence someone, your vocabulary can subconsciously reflect your mood or emotion. Bring this reflex to a level of consciousness.[24]

Please note some of the high quality word choices from the following commencement address:

> Second, more broadly, your generation will enjoy more legally established freedoms and rights than probably have been enjoyed by any other nation. By contrast, much of history and much of the world today is a parade of statism and tyranny.[25]

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[23]Whittier, p. 4.

[24]Campbell, p. 135.

[25]Mark W. Cannon, "Problems Create Opportunities," Commencement Address at Morris Brown College, May 11, 1980, p. 4.

An effective speechwriter will structure his speech and make sure that the speech has clear interrelationships and transitions. There are countless ways to structure a speech. The speechwriter should tailor the speech structure to his needs and purposes. Internal structure is also important. For example, the use of parallelism can heighten the vividness of a thought. Parallelism links similar words or ideas in a balanced structure: "Bigotry has not head and cannot think; no heart and cannot feel"; "Charity beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."[26]

Smooth transitions are part of making the persuasive speech clear and understandable. "Moving fluently from point to point, from argument to anecdote or example, requires smooth transition. With a speaker, words and phrases are the bridges."[27]

An effective use of transition in a commencement address is as follows:

> Rarely have so many major problems existed which could be remedied by the adoption of a single theme--sacrifice today for important future gain through pursuit of creative solutions, excellence and higher productivity. This must replace choosing immediate self-gratification along with complacency and carelessness. As a group of well-educated young people entering into the American economy, you can help make this change. What are the elements required to accomplish this?

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[26]Whittier, p. 4.

[27]Campbell, p. 135.

> First, we must seek satisfaction in excellence in our work whatever it may be.[28]

In this example an effective transition was made from describing America's problems to the items that can be accomplished in order to initiate a change.

A writer for the Topeka State Journal summed up the importance of language in speechwriting while commenting on the Democratic Convention:

> One thing about the Democratic Convention, oratory seems to be dead. Not one orator appeared on the rostrum. Not one speaker showered the spectators with wit, humor, pathos, flights of language, or flights of thought. . . . If the conventions are going to permit television to expose them, they will have to adopt new devices. Oratory is a glorious art. It is designed to make words act psychologically as music. The true orator must have language.[29]

In summary, this discussion has focused on some of the important concepts in the preparation of a speech. From the introduction of a speech to its conclusion, a speechwriter should have definite goals, an appropriate discussion of the topic, and maintain an awareness of the personal characteristics of the speaker.

Five major elements of speechwriting were discussed in this chapter. Writers that make effective use of illustrations, definitions, analogies, stastics, and language in a speech will be well-received by the

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[28]Cannon, p. 9.

[29]"Democratic National Convention," Topeka State Journal: Topeka, Kansas, July 19, 1960, p. 15.

public address critic. In essence, effective speech-writers will assume a role: to some extent he or she must be able to impart confidence and to sense the character of an audience.